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Chapter Ten

SYRIA AND LEBANON

The Land and the People

The area of the present Syria and Lebanon lies to the north of Arabia Deserta and is the western horn of the Fertile Crescent. The two republics do not enclose within their boundaries a natural geographic entity and their climate and topography are best studied in relation to the surrounding countries;[1] but within the political boundaries of the two states, the following geographical divisions may roughly be distinguished:

(1) *The Coastal Strip*. This is about twenty miles wide near Latakia and rather less just north of Tripoli, but in some places disappears and the mountains meet the sea. Olives, bananas, citrus, and vegetables are cultivated intensively near Beirut.

(2) *The Mountains*. Starting from the north, the first coastal mountains are the Jebel Ansariya (also known as the Alawi Mountains) which average 4,000 feet and are well populated on the western slopes. To the south is the Homs–Tripoli gap and then starts the Lebanon range with peaks of over 10,000 feet. Even on the upper slopes of this range water is plentiful, there is close cultivation, and the villages and towns are prosperous. Near Beirut are situated the mountain resorts to which most of the city workers move each night when the summer brings its humid heat. The interior ranges of mountains lying parallel to that of the Lebanon are the Anti-Lebanon (between Homs and Zahle) reaching over 7,000 feet and the range of Hermon (between Zahle and the Israel border) which reaches 9,200 feet. Water and cultivation are far less plentiful on these than on the coastal mountains. Farther inland still and to the south of Damascus lie the Leja, a bleak area of igneous rock, and the Jebel Druze, which reaches 5,000–6,000 feet and lies north of the Jordan border.

(3) *Plains and Plateaux*. Hardly any of the territory of Syria and Lebanon lies less than 700 feet above sea-level and south of Hama almost all the land is over 1,600 feet. The richest agricultural land is on fairly high ground and forms part of a

[1] See W. B. Fisher, *The Middle East; a Physical, Social, and Regional Geography* (London, Methuen, 1950).